

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth, for His word is truth. Amen

First Sunday in Advent (2020)

The Lord is our Righteousness

Rev. Toby Byrd

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’” (Jeremiah 23:5–6, ESV)

This is the season of busy. Elections, Thanksgiving and Christmas, are all events which spur busyness within our nation. The newly elected politicians are busy preparing for the duties of their office and families, especially moms, are busy preparing for Christmas and the excitement of visiting family. So this season is one of hurry here and hurry there, buy this, buy that, no time for rest, no time for reflection on the meaning of Advent. The goal seems to be ‘shop till you drop.’ The Church, too, becomes quite busy during Advent and Christmas. In addition to the preparations for the Sunday’s in Advent, there are the midweek Advent services, a Christmas Eve program, and a Christmas Day Divine Service that beg for attention. So, like moms, pastors and altar guilds and organists are also caught up in the busyness of the season.

However, we must be careful not to get so busy that we forget the meaning of the season.

In the Old Testament Reading for today, Jeremiah writes, ***“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’” (Jeremiah 23:5–6, ESV)***

Patience, for thousands of years the people waited with patience. It all began in the Garden of Eden. There, Satan, the father of lies, possessed a serpent through whom he tempted Adam and Eve to sin against God. Their sin brought corruption into the world, and this corruption destroyed the divine righteousness given to man when he was created. Therefore, since the fall, any righteousness claimed by man was a righteousness corrupted by sin. A sin so dark and sinister that man could not overcome it. But God, foreknowing man’s fall, had a plan to restore the righteousness which man would lose. From man would come a man who would make man righteous in God’s sight once again. That man would be the Christ, the very Son of God. But not only as a man, but according to His divine nature also. Christ, the God/man, is *The LORD our righteousness*.

The promise that God gave in the Garden, that from the seed of the woman would come one who would crush the head of the serpent and restore the righteousness of man, required centuries of patient waiting. From Adam the lineage went through Seth, then on to Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob, and Moses. One would suspect that the Messiah would come through the priestly tribe of Levi, but this was not the case. Rather, He would come through the tribe of Judah, through the ancestry of King David. Thus, for thousands of years the people waited, hoped, and reflected on the Messiah and their hopes were kept alive by the prophets and priest who

continued to prophecy His coming. Then, one cold winter's eve, He appeared, being born in a stable in a little country village to a virgin, a peasant girl.

But His arrival was an event unseen in the annuals of history. An angel visited shepherds from nearby hills and said to them, ***“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*** (Luke 2:10–11, *ESV*) Then a multitude of angels in the heavens began to sing, ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*** (Luke 2:14, *ESV*) Thus, the heavenly announcement, *the Lord our righteousness* is born! The long-awaited Messiah has come. He is here! Glory to God in the highest!

St. Matthew tells us of the triumphant entry of our Lord Jesus into the city of Jerusalem the last week of His reign on earth. He enters to their shouts of acclamation, ***“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”*** (Matthew 21:9, *ESV*) He enters as their long-awaited Messiah. What a momentous day this is! But sadly the crowd falls short of understanding just who this Jesus is who rode into their city to their shouts of joy and jubilation. Sadly, for them, Jesus was not *the Lord their righteousness*, but rather He was a conquering king, one who would overthrow Roman rule and ascend to the throne of David, establishing a new earthly kingdom of Israel. A nation of glory, power, and wealth. But to their disappointment, Jesus would not and did not do this. The kingdom He established was one of far greater glory, far greater power, and far greater wealth than the people could ever conceive. His kingdom was not of this world. Why, if these were God's people, brought up in the Word of the Lord, didn't they understand that their wait was not for an earthly king but for a heavenly Savior? Why didn't they understand that their king would not restore glory, power, and wealth, but righteousness? Holy Scripture tells us why, their understanding was worldly, not heavenly. Thus, they did not wait nor properly prepare for His coming.

It is no different today, the preparations demanded by God for the coming of our Lord, both those necessary for a truly blessed Christmas and those for His second coming, are shamefully neglected by the majority of people. Even we, who call ourselves Christians, become negligent at times in preparing our hearts to receive the Christmas message: ***“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*** (Luke 2:11, *ESV*) Failure to prepare the heart for this message is the reason why so many will not receive a spiritual benefit from the Christmas festival. Their hearts will know nothing of the joy which makes Christmas the most joyful festival of the church year. So, let us not be like them. Instead, let us embrace the spirit of Advent and prepare ourselves to receive the Christmas message with hearts eager to hear and to believe. With hearts eager to receive *the Lord our Righteousness*.

Jeremiah said, ***“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king.”*** The Lord promises to raise a King for His people. The Messiah shall be our King. God gives us that same promise through the prophet Zechariah, saying, ***“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you.”*** (Zechariah 9:9, *ESV*) He comes from the royal family of David as ***“a righteous Branch.”*** Today, through the revelation of Holy Scripture, we know this prophecy has been fulfilled. Jesus Christ is the promised King. Through Mary, He is the Branch from David. He is the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5). Having taken on our flesh, He is like us in every way, yet He differs from all other humans.

He is declared to be God's ***“Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,”*** (Romans 1:3–4, *ESV*) Our Lord Jesus is righteous and holy, free from the pollution of sin. Unlike ourselves, who are conceived in sin,

our Lord Jesus was conceived holy and righteous. St. Luke tells us the angel Gabriel came to Mary and told her, ***“Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.”*** Mary asks, ***“How will this be, since I am a virgin?”*** And the angel answered her, ***“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.”*** (Luke 1:30-31, 34-35, ESV)

The Righteous One, our Lord Jesus, had no human father. He was brought forth by the Holy Spirit, to be God’s Son. Through Him our righteousness is restored, and we are brought to salvation. He is ***“The LORD our righteousness.”*** Coming in the flesh to be our righteousness, He fulfilled the Law in our place, redeeming us from the consequence of the Law. He alone rendered to God the obedience we owe Him but are unable to pay. He came to bear the punishment of our sin, to suffer and die in our place. ***“For our sake [God] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:21, ESV) Thus, Christ is the righteousness of men. But now the great question is, is He your righteousness?

During this season when we are reminded to wait and reflect on the coming of Christ, can we honestly say that Christ is ***“the LORD of our righteousness.”*** As we contemplate and reflect on this question, the first thing we must ask ourselves is: “Do we need a better righteousness than our own to stand before God? That is, are our efforts to fulfill the Law of God sufficient to make us righteous in the sight of God? Some think they are, but the answer is no, we are not, we cannot fulfill the Law, and therefore, we have no righteousness of our own. St. Paul reminds us, ***“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”*** (Romans 3:10-12, ESV) Isaiah also tells us, ***“We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.”*** (Isaiah 64:6, ESV) So woe to the person who dares to stand before God robed in the garment of their own righteousness. The righteousness of man will not open heaven’s door because man has no righteousness of his own.

Unable to fulfill the Law, unable to become righteous in God’s sight, we must ask, is man doomed? No. God has provided the answer, His Son, Jesus Christ. Again St. Paul reminds us, ***“But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”*** (Romans 3:21-22, ESV)

The prophecy has been fulfilled, *the Lord our Righteousness* has come and is now among us. But this revelation is not one that is obvious to all people, it is only seen through the eyes of faith, faith in the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is *the Lord our Righteousness*, who came into the world to fulfill His Father’s plan, our salvation, our restoration to righteousness so we can stand before God. But the righteousness we obtain is not ours, it belongs to *the Lord our Righteousness*. Through faith, God declares sinners righteous for Christ’s sake; that is, your sins have been imputed or charged to Christ, the Savior, and Christ’s righteousness has been imputed or credited to you.

Yes, the Messiah has come, but still we wait. We wait in great anticipation of our meeting Him in heaven. We wait with great anticipation in receiving the crown of righteousness He has laid up for us in heaven. As we wait, we know that He is with us even now. His Spirit fills our hearts, granting us the gift of faith to believe and wait with patience as He continues to make us righteous through His Means of Grace; His true body and blood given to us on each Lord’s Day for the forgiveness of our sins, through His absolution given to us in His stead through the voice of the pastor, and through His blessed water of Baptism which cleanses us of sin. These Gospel blessings continue to make us righteous while we wait. So, during this Advent season and every

season remember, wait for *the Lord our Righteousness* that you may receive the crown of righteousness waiting for you. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.